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Integrated Justice in Washington State

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States look to innovative funding plans for integrated justice

(Adapted from an [article](#) by Blake Harrison, National Conference of State Legislators)

Although legislative appropriations and federal grants are generally the source of funds for development, user fees and bond sales are two increasingly popular vehicles for providing the justice community with the resources needed for integration.

Federal grants and legislative appropriations

Federal grants provide the largest part of state crime information integration budgets. The two biggest sources are the [Byrne Formula Grant Program](#) and the [National Criminal History Improvement Program](#), which have contributed more than \$5 million to Washington throughout the last five years. Although the legislature has not yet directly allocated any resources to integrated justice in Washington, appropriations have funded several integration plans in other states. For example, Minnesota has spent more than \$57 million on [CrimNet](#), considered by many in the crime information field as a pioneering effort.

Innovative approaches

Funding integration efforts by means other than appropriations is emerging as a way to start and maintain projects. The most popular approaches include fees, fines, taxes and bond sales. States have created special accounts, funded through fees for services or fines. Several have authorized an increase in those assessments, and others have given entities the authority to charge reasonable amounts to offset the cost of the integration programs.

Activities in other states

- Arizona created a county jail excise tax to fund an integrated criminal justice information system.
- Florida authorized the use of civil penalties to pay for local law enforcement automation.
- Louisiana now requires fees for civil applicants to be paid to an information fund.
- New Mexico has authorized the Department of Public Safety to charge local, state and federal law enforcement agencies access fees to its telecommunication systems.
- The Kansas Legislature created the Information Network of Kansas in 1990, a self-funding public/private partnership providing electronic access to public information.
- Nebraska has diverted 2 cents from the state's cigarette tax since 1996 to the Information Technology Infrastructure Fund. This amount, estimated to be about \$2.6 million per year, has helped fund Nebraska's Criminal Justice Information System.
- Massachusetts has pioneered the use of technology bonds to pay for information technology investments. The legislature issued a \$109 million bond in 1992 and approved the sale of more than \$300 million in bonds in 2002 to fund further initiatives

Innovative information technology funding is a significant new trend that can enable governments to leverage dwindling resources. Combined with traditional means, such as general fund appropriations and federal grants, it can help integrate government crime information and contribute to public safety.

Washington State Patrol (WSP) uses federal grants to improve access to criminal history information

The Washington State Patrol has used federal grants to eliminate huge backlogs of information waiting to be processed and to make criminal history information more accurate and readily available to officers in the field and to the public.

“Even though there is widespread support among legislators for criminal justice integration,” says Deputy Chief Maurice King of the WSP, “the state's austere

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financial climate cannot garner additional funding from contending priorities. This fact underscores the magnitude of the federal money the state of Washington receives.”

WSP reduces CHRI backlog

Over the last two years, the WSP has eliminated a backlog in its Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) of over 156,000 fingerprint cards and has nearly finished reducing the Patrol’s disposition report backlog. The disposition backlog has been reduced from an estimated 381,000 documents in November 2002, to 100,000. By the end of the year, the backlog will be completely eliminated. This means that law enforcement officers and members of the community, who frequently use this information to make employment and licensing decisions, will have access to more accurate criminal histories.

WSP use federal grants to build systems

Grants from the federal [Byrne Formula Grant Program](#) and [National Criminal History Improvement Program](#) have enabled the Backlog Reduction Project, as well as the Live-Scan to Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), which connects existing fingerprinting systems in local criminal justice agencies throughout Washington to the state criminal history system. This allows for fingerprints and related arrest data to be **immediately transmitted to the state repository at the time of fingerprinting**—not mailed—and real-time identification can be returned from the state within two hours. In practical terms, criminals with outstanding warrants using false identification are much less likely to be inadvertently released from custody. Moreover, the associated arrests are immediately added to the state criminal history record, making background checks more complete. Live Scan machines, which cost about \$30,000 each, are now operational at 38 sites and provide approximately 60 percent of the state’s CHRI electronically to the WSP. A connection to King County data, which is planned for implementation later this year, will increase electronic submissions by approximately 25 percent. This has been accomplished throughout the last two years, largely as a result of federal grants.

The WSP receives requests for an average of 240,000 background checks per month. Many of these requests are to screen applicants who want to work with children, persons with developmental disabilities and vulnerable adults. Background information is also useful to prosecutors making a criminal sentencing recommendation, sheriff’s officers determining if individuals are entitled to have a concealed pistol license and local police departments issuing licenses to drive taxis or sell door to door. The backlog reduction and AFIS projects have enabled the WSP to dramatically improve the timeliness and accuracy of information that is critical to effective law enforcement and public safety.

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For more information on these projects, contact the WSP at (360) 705-5100 or visit the WSP Web site at <http://www.wa.gov/wsp/index.htm>.



This example demonstrates the need for justice integration.

Requests for analysis submitted to the State Crime Lab are sent via U.S. Mail and reports are transmitted or communicated via phone. Frequently, busy scientists at the crime lab aren't notified when cases have been settled or dismissed. As a result, State Crime Lab final reports are sometimes unnecessary and other important projects are delayed.



Justice Served ranks Pierce County in top 10 court Web sites

Who else is offering an electronic inmate indexing feature that includes booking charges and links to Superior Court cases? Users can also view and print Superior Court and jail calendars online. Finally, this site has case indexing, a host of online attorney content and an e-filing intranet.

[Full Article](#)



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MSNBC report: al-Qaida interested in ferries

The FBI is warning of increased al-Qaida interest in targeting U.S. ferry operations based on several reports of suspicious activity around ferry terminals. The weekly advisory says no specific threats have surfaced but that increased security awareness is “prudent” because ferry operations have minimal security measures in place.

[Full Article](#)

Thurston County offers mitigation of court tickets via Internet

Starting on August 4, the public will be able to mitigate their tickets from home using a the Internet. Persons mitigating traffic tickets admit they committed the infraction, but are given an opportunity to explain the circumstances and ask the court to reduce the fine. The online process will save a trip to the Thurston County courthouse. People using the computer method will be advised of the court’s eventual decision by e-mail.

[Full Press Release](#)
[Thurston County Court](#)

Why is integrated justice so important?

From [*“Consequences of Inadequately Integrated Justice Information Systems”*](#) Michael R. Geerken, *Center for Society, Law and Justice*, March 2002

The case for integrated justice rests in part on cost efficiency arguments connected to the elimination of redundant data entry, manpower savings in the retrieval and compilation of information, and technology savings from open systems and common standards. ... **improvements in the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of such information have important public safety benefits and at the same time enhance justice and the rights of suspects.**

Examples from the Real World

Seminole County, Florida (p.31)

Between June and September 1998, seven inmates were released from the Seminole County, Florida, jail because of records clerks' misinterpretation of court documents. One of the releases was a suspect in an Orange County murder case. Records clerks at the jail work from handwritten court minutes sent by the court. They must interpret these notes and enter the results into the jail computer system.

Source: Orlando Sentinel, January 19, 1999.

Durham, North Carolina (p.31)

[Kenneth] Gagum, 39, was a habitual felon sentenced in August 1999 to 80 to 105 months in jail by a Durham, North Carolina court. However, the jail was not notified of the sentence until five days later. Gagum had been released on bail the same day he received his sentence.

Source: The Herald-Sun, September 2, 1999.